

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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SUBJECT: DEVOLUTION: SCOTTISH LABOR PARTY REACTION

REF: LONDON 18451

SUMMARY - DEVOLUTION WHITE PAPER PRECIPITATED SEVERAL
NOTEWORTHY DEVELOPMENTS IN SCOTTISH LABOR PARTY (SLP)
OVER PAST WEEKEND. EXECUTIVE BOARD OF SLP "WELCOMED
WHOLEHEARTEDLY" WHITE PAPER PROPOSALS AND APPROVED PLANS
FOR PUBLIC CAMPAIGN TO EXPLAIN GOVERNMENT'S PROPOSALS TO
SCOTTISH ELECTORATE. SLP UNITY, HOWEVER, WAS FRACTURED
BY RESIGNATION OF BOARD MEMBER (AND MP) JIM SILLARS WHO
VOWED TO CARRY ON FIGHT FOR INCREASED ECONOMIC POWERS FOR
SCOTTISH ASSEMBLY WITHIN SLP. GOVERNMENT, MEANWHILE,
KICKED OFF ITS CAMPAIGN TO STEM SCOTTISH BACKLASH AND
SELL ITS PROPOSALS -- A FORMIDABLE TASK INDEED. END
SUMMARY.

1. EXECUTIVE BOARD OF SCOTTISH LABOR PARTY (SLP) MET
DECEMBER 13 AND VOTED OVERWHELMINGLY TO ENDORSE GOVERN-
MENT'S DEVOLUTION WHITE PAPER (REFTEL). SLP EXECUTIVE
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ALSO APPROVED PLANS FOR MAJOR CAMPAIGN DESIGNED TO EX-

PLAIN AND JUSTIFY GOVERNMENT'S DEVOLUTION SCHEME TO SCOTTISH VOTERS WHICH WILL BEGIN FOLLOWING CHRISTMAS HOLIDAYS.

2. SLP UNITY, HOWEVER, WAS SHAKEN WHEN EXECUTIVE BOARD MEMBER AND MP JIM SILLARS ANNOUNCED HIS RESIGNATION FROM THE BOARD AND HIS INTENTION TO FIGHT WITHIN SLP TO STRENGTHEN PROPOSED POWERS OF SCOTTISH ASSEMBLY OVER TRADE, INDUSTRY AND EMPLOYMENT. SLP'S RESEARCH DIRECTOR ALSO RESIGNED IN SUPPORT OF SILLARS AND WILL JOIN HIM IN FIGHT. WHILE PRESS SPECULATED THAT SILLARS AND OTHER LABOR PARTY "MAXIMUM DEVOLUTIONISTS" MIGHT SEEK TO ESTABLISH BREAK-AWAY GROUP, SILLARS DENIED ANY SUCH INTENTION, AFFIRMING HIS DECISION TO STAY AND FIGHT WITHIN SLP FRAMEWORK.

3. AS SLP EXECUTIVE WAS APPROVING ITS PLAN TO SELL WHITE PAPER, GOVERNMENT LAUNCHED ITS CAMPAIGN TO THE SAME END. SCOTTISH OFFICE UNDERSECRETARY HARRY EWING, WHO WORKED CLOSELY WITH LEADER OF HOUSE EDWARD SHORT IN PREPARING WHITE PAPER, OPENED GOVERNMENT'S OFFENSIVE IN SCOTLAND. CAPRYING ATTACK TO SCOTTISH NATIONAL PARTY AND SEPARATISTS, EWING STRESSED NEGATIVE ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS OF INDEPENDENCE AND ARGUED THAT SEPARATIST SOLUTION WOULD CAUSE MAJOR INDUSTRIAL CORPORATIONS TO MOVE OUT OF SCOTLAND, TAKING JOBS AND INVESTMENT WITH THEM. SCOTTISH SECRETARY WILLIAM ROSS, LEADER SHORT AND SCOTTISH OFFICE MINISTER BRUCE MILLAN ARE EXPECTED TO SPEAK IN SCOTLAND IN WEEKS TO COME, ECHOING EWING'S MESSAGE.

4. COMMENT: WE UNDERSTAND THAT SOME MEMBERS OF SLP EXECUTIVE WERE LESS ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT WHITE PAPER THAN WAS INDICATED BY OFFICIAL STATEMENT. THEY WERE NOT, HOWEVER, PREPARED TO JOIN SILLARS IN RESIGNING FROM EXECUTIVE, AND CAN BE EXPECTED TO SOLDIER ON IN SUPPORT OF GOVERNMENT POSITION. SILLARS EARLIER TOLD EMBOFF THAT HE WAS CONSIDERING DRAMATIC ACTION TO POINT UP WEAKNESSES IN WHITE PAPER, BUT HAD REJECTED OPTIONS OF RESIGNING FROM LABOR PARTY OR PARLIAMENT. STRENGTH OF HIS RESOLVE IN THIS REGARD, OF COURSE, MIGHT WEAKEN SHOULD HE FAIL

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TO PERSUADE GOVERNMENT -- AND WE BELIEVE HE WILL FAIL -- TO GIVE ASSEMBLY GREATER ECONOMIC POWER. EWING TOLD ANOTHER EMBOFF THAT HE FELT WHITE PAPER WOULD AFFORD GOVERNMENT AND LABOR PARTY FIRST OPPORTUNITY TO ATTACK SEPARATIST MOVEMENT FRONTALLY. HE BELIEVES THAT LABOR WOULD PREVAIL IN THIS ARGUMENT, BUT WE ARE LESS SANGUINE AS TO ULTIMATE OUTCOME, AT LEAST BASED ON OUR INITIAL READING OF SCOTTISH REACTION TO WHITE PAPER. EMBOFF WILL

BE VISITING SCOTLAND EARLY IN NEXT YEAR TO ASSESS IMPACT
OF WHITE PAPER AND PREVAILING SCOTTISH OPINION.

RICHARDSON

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